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SUBJECT: LTTE USE OF LANDMINES TAKES ITS TOLL

REF: 96 COLOMBO 3209

¶1. SUMMARY: DURING THE PAST EIGHT MONTHS, OVER 225 PERSONS--SOME MILITARY, MANY CIVILIAN--HAVE REPORTEDLY FALLEN VICTIM TO LANDMINES LAID BY THE INSURGENT LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE) IN THE WAR-AFFLICTED NORTH AND EAST. INCIDENTS THIS YEAR ALONE HAVE KILLED AT LEAST 16 CIVILIANS AND WOUNDED 12. THE LAYING OF LANDMINES--BY BOTH THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT--HAS BEEN COMMON IN THE FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD INSURGENCY. UNTIL THE INSURGENCY IS RESOLVED, RESTRAINT IN THEIR USE IS UNLIKELY. END COMMENT.

¶2. RECENT PRESS REPORTS STATE THAT DURING THE PAST EIGHT MONTHS, OVER 225 PERSONS--SOME MILITARY, MANY CIVILIAN--HAVE BEEN KILLED BY LANDMINES LAID BY THE INSURGENT LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE) IN JAFFNA AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WAR-TORN NORTH AND EAST. IN A RECENT INCIDENT IN LATE JANUARY, THE LTTE ON THE JAFFNA PENINSULA BLASTED CLAYMORE MINES ON TWO OCCASIONS WITHIN CLOSE PROXIMITY OF EACH OTHER, KILLING NINE CIVILIANS AND ONE SOLDIER. FIVE OF THE CIVILIANS WERE WOMEN. SIX CIVILIANS AND TWO SOLDIERS WERE ALSO WOUNDED. THE BLASTS OCCURRED ON THE PONNALAI CAUSEWAY CONNECTING JAFFNA AND KARAITHIVU ISLAND AS TROOPS CONDUCTED A ROUTINE ROUTE-CLEARING OPERATION.

¶3. ON JANUARY 28, SIX CIVILIANS WERE KILLED AND FIVE INJURED WHEN A VAN IN WHICH THEY WERE TRAVELING RAN OVER A LANDMINE AT KUDAPOKUNA IN WELIKANDA IN EASTERN PROVINCE. THE ARMY HAS FORCED TO CARRY OUT ROUTE-CLEARING OPERATIONS BEFORE REACHING THE AREA AS THEY FEARED THE LTTE MIGHT HAVE PLANTED ADDITIONAL EXPLOSIVES. MEANWHILE ONE SOLDIER HAS KILLED AND THREE INJURED WHEN THEIR TRUCK HIT A LANDMINE ON THE SAME DAY. ON JANUARY 26, A DEFENSE MINISTRY PRESS RELEASE SAID THAT A CIVILIAN HAS KILLED AND ANOTHER INJURED WHEN A TRACTOR HAS DESTROYED IN A LANDMINE BLAST AT PETHALAI IN BATTICALOA DISTRICT OF THE EAST.

¶4. ON JANUARY 18, THE TIGERS SPREAD MINES AFTER A PRE-DAWN ATTACK ON KANUGAHAWEWA POLICE POST AT KEBITHIGOLLEWA IN ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT. TWENTY THREE POLICE PERSONNEL WERE KILLED AND 20 OTHERS WERE WOUNDED IN THE ATTACK, SOME REPORTEDLY BY THE MINES. ONE AMBULANCE HAS DESTROYED WHEN A MINE EXPLODED. ON FEBRUARY 10, TWO SOLDIERS AND THREE TERRORISTS WERE KILLED IN A CONFRONTATION AT PUTTUR IN THE JAFFNA DISTRICT. MILITARY SOURCES SAID TERRORISTS HAD ACTIVATED A CLAYMORE MINE WHEN TROOPS WERE RETURNING AFTER CONDUCTING AN OPERATION. ON JANUARY 12, EIGHT SOLDIERS WERE KILLED AND ANOTHER TEN WERE WOUNDED IN A LANDMINE EXPLOSION AT KACHCHAI IN JAFFNA. THE ARMY TRACTOR ON WHICH THE TROOPS

WERE TRAVELING WAS CAUGHT IN THE LANDMINE BLAST.

15. COMMENT: THE LAYING OF LANDMINES--BY BOTH THE LTTE AND THE GOVERNMENT--HAS BEEN COMMON IN THE FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD CIVIL WAR. CIVILIAN CASUALTIES, THOUGH NOT REGULARLY NOTED IN THE PRESS, MOUNT. UNTIL THE INSURGENCY IS RESOLVED, RESTRAINT IN LANDMINE USE IS UNLIKELY. END COMMENT.

BURLEIGH